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ABSTRACT

The teaching activities presented in this pamphlet focus on children's playground rhymes, chants, and traditional verse. The pamphlet begins with a discussion of children's lack of interest in poetry, a definition of poetry, and suggested ways to approach poetry. Following that, it explores ways to use playground chants and traditional verse: (1) to increase children's enjoyment of language (through tongue twisters and nonsense language); (2) to develop their response to rhyme and rhythm; (3) to provide a basis for children's own writing; (4) to ease the way into reading other forms of literature; and (5) to encourage children to read--through the use of riddles, parodies, fractured nursery rhymes, train chants, and scary stories. (EL)

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Children's Playground Rhymes, Chants & Traditional Verse

Moira Robinson

PETA

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Primary English Notes ... from the Primary English Teaching Association
PETA

CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND RHYMES, CHANTS & TRADITIONAL VERSE

. . . *INSIDE*
in the classroom, children often suffer from the "Poetry Yuk" syndrome, yet. . .
. . . *OUTSIDE*
in the playground, they constantly use verse for counting-out rhymes, for skipping — or for the sheer fun of it.
. . . *INSIDE*
we tend to bombard children with prose (which is a relatively alien form) while. . .
. . . *OUTSIDE*
they are instinctively jigging to rhymes like:

One two three,
Mother caught a flea,
Put it in the teapot
And made a cup of tea.[1]

. . . *INSIDE*
we present them with all sorts of unfamiliar packaged, adult-written, reading material when...
. . . *OUTSIDE*
they are spontaneously circulating and adapting rhymes that have been part of children's language for generations.

This P.E.N. looks at ways of using playground chants and traditional verse:

- ☐ *to increase children's enjoyment of language;*
- ☐ *to develop their response to rhythm;*
- ☐ *to provide a basis for children's own writing;*
- ☐ *to ease the way into other forms of literature;*
- ☐ *as a means of encouraging children to read.*

Poetry

THE "POETRY-YUK" SYNDROME

If children have a natural affinity with rhythm and rhyme, why the "Poetry-yuk" reaction? One reason is that adults have often had bad experiences with poetry themselves and so have become scared of it and, because they are scared, they have an image of poetry as something ultra serious and threatening. They don't feel relaxed enough to let their hair down and really enjoy things like:

Mollie Vickers wets her knickers,
Georgie's father's big and black. . .[3]

Responding to poetry through laughter can seem to some adults as bad as laughing at music which is "classical" and which, supposedly, should be deadly serious at all times. Poetry, in fact, is one more victim of the division of our culture into highbrow/serious and lowbrow/popular, and therefore many teachers, with the best of intentions, have tended to give children only poetry that has been sanitised for their protection — "pure" poetry about "poetic" things like *Daffodils* or *Spring* — and to ignore everything they have mentally dismissed as being mere "verse", because of its lightweight, sometimes vulgar and not quite respectable nature.

POETRY IS WHAT?

We should get rid of artificial barriers between poetry and "verse". Dylan Thomas once gave as good a working definition as any: *"Poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle, what makes me want to do this or that. . . or nothing."*

Poetry should *excite* us because of its *rhythm* or because of its *language*, or its *imagery* and *ideas*, or because of the *emotions* it arouses. Something should "happen" to us when we read poetry. If we read a poem about a little bird and all we feel at the end is a faint tinge of boredom then, be it ever so "pure" and beautifully rhymed, it is perhaps not a "good" poem for us. On the other hand, to read something like the following may, in fact, cause one's "toenails to twinkle" irresistibly:

I had a baby brother,
His name was Tiny Tim,
I put him in the bathtub
To teach him how to swim. . .

What we should avoid at all costs is poetry that is vacuous, as bland and innocuous as canned baby food. *Children's traditional verse* would never have survived were it vacuous; it survives because of its strong, infectious rhythms, because it cocks a snook at the adult world, and because of the *rightness* of its language for its users.

POETRY AT ANY TIME

Because some teachers are scared of poetry, they turn the poetry lesson into a major ordeal — like a visit to the dentist. Our main concern should be to make poetry as natural a mode of expression *inside* the classroom as it often is *outside*. Barry Breen, himself a poet, a teacher and a compiler of anthologies, once said:

> *"I like to let poems come in as easily as possible. Hey, there's a good poem on that. This fellow said something about it and this fellow said something else, and this one's a newspaper article, here's a short story and that one's a poem. And poetry becomes a normal sort of resource."*

That's what it should be, as natural a resource as a picture book or novel. We don't need to store it up for a *special* time or place when we use a *special* solemn "poetry" voice. If there's an odd moment, launch into a chant *for the sheer fun of it;* if children have been sitting still for too long, get them *moving* with a skipping rhyme. Ask them for suggestions for other rhymes so that poetry is a two-way affair, a time for *sharing*, not for one person declaiming while the class passively listen — like stunned mullet.

Chants

CHANTS TO ENJOY TOGETHER

Get the children to join in with the "longest poem in the world", starting very softly and growing progressively louder:

"Who put the overalls in Mrs Murphy's chowder?"
Nobody answered, so she said it all the louder:
"Who put the overalls in Mrs Murphy's chowder?"
Nobody answered, so she said it all the louder. . .

The following street rhyme, from the North of Ireland, is great fun to do:

Ahem, Ahem, me mother has gone to church.
She said I'm not to play with you
because you're in the dirt.
It isn't because you're dirty, it isn't because you're clean,
It's 'cos you've got the whooping cough and EAT MARGARINE!

As Virginia Ferguson suggests in *Happily Ever After*[4], this is particularly effective if one group starts after the others have said the first two lines, because it creates a *contrapuntal* effect which emphasises poetry's affinity to music. Again, start the chant softly and end with a great shout on "EAT MARGARINE!"

One of the skipping rhymes in June Factor's *Far Out, Brussel Sprout!*[5] begins:

Jelly on the plate, jelly on the plate
Wiggle woggle, wiggle woggle,
Jelly on the plate. . .

but with its clear-cut directions it makes an equally good *action rhyme* which children can chant,

slowly at first, then faster and faster. For anyone wanting to use children's own chants and rhymes, June Factor's book is absolutely indispensible; she is doing for Australia what the Opies have done for Britain, but her book, with its comic black and white illustrations by Peter Viska, is designed very much for *children themselves* to enjoy, not as a scholarly commentary on their lore and language.

One last example was given to me by a relief teacher who uses it as part of her "survival kit" in any school, with any grade:

I'm TAKING HOME my baby bumble bee,
Won't my mummy be so proud of me!
I'm taking home my baby bumble bee...
Ouch! It stung me!
I'm SQUISHING UP my baby bumble bee,
Won't my mummy be so proud of me!
I'm squishing up my baby bumble bee...
Yuk! It's all over me!
I'm LICKING UP my baby bumble bee,
Won't my mummy be so proud of me!
I'm licking up my baby bumble bee...
Ugh! I feel sick.
I'm THROWING UP my baby bumble bee,
Won't my mummy be so proud of me!
I'm throwing up my baby bumble bee...
There! That feels much better!

Grisly stuff, but like Roald Dahl's *The Twits* or *George's Marvellous Medicine* (Cape), it appeals to children's delight in "taboo" humour. If one were to remove from children's traditional verse everything "not quite nice" there would be precious little left!

Increasing Enjoyment of Language

As Iona and Peter Opie point out in *Lore and Language of School Children*[5], in children's rhymes "the ridiculousness of life is underlined . . . danger and death mocked, and the *curiosity of language* itself is savoured". It is savoured in rhymes like:

Nobody loves me, everybody hates me,
I'm going out to eat some worms,
Big fat juicy ones, long slim slimy ones,
Itsy bitsy fuzzy wuzzy worms...[1]

or

Ooey gooey custard,
Green maggot pie,
Four dogs' gizzards
And one cat's eye...[1]

There is real relish in the sound of the words themselves as well as illicit glee at the whole idea of eating worms or *green maggot pie*.

If we are going to extend and develop children's language, we need other poems that excite through the *sound* and *sensation* of the words themselves, poems like J. A. Lindon's *Sink Song*, which is a wonderful one to chant on school camps at washing-up time:

Scouring out the porridge pot,
Round and round and round!
Out with all the scraith-a-scoopery,
Lift the eely ooly droopery...[6]

Try also *"Double double, toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble"*[7] or Eve Merriam's *Weather*, which an eight-year-old in Kaye Webb's anthology *I Like This Poem*[7] says she likes "because of the funny words and funny rhymes". The most important thing is that words *excite;* it's only of secondary importance whether the words are "real" or not.

For younger children, words have an in-built potency regardless of meaning; they become part of a ritual for counting out or for skipping, and the strangeness and unfamiliarity of phrases like *Onery overy ickery am* or *Inky pinky ponky*[1] add to the power of the incantation. *Words are like talismans,* and, thinking back to poems one enjoyed as a child, one finds the same process at work:

Chimborazo Cotopaxi
Took me by the hand...

One doesn't want to find out who or what Chimborazo and Cotopaxi are; the magic of W. J. Turner's *Romance*[7] lies in the unexplained mystery of the names, the words. The same is true of John Masefield's *Cargoes*; just read it like a nautical incantation:

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir...[7]

We don't need a lesson on boats, we need only those mysterious, unfamiliar names to wind up the spell.

TONGUE TWISTERS

Children become fascinated by tongue twisters or nonsense words as their own mastery in language develops. One can only appreciate the wit of the following if one *knows* that the language is not "proper":

The spring is sprung,
The grass is riz.
I wonder where the birdies is?
Some say the bird is on the wing,
But that's absurd —
The wing is on the bird.

The tumbling, stumbling sounds of *How many cans can a cannibal nibble*[1] emphasise the deviation from the usual sound of language. *One has to know the norm before one can appreciate variations played upon it.* Tongue twisters are a milestone in language development and should be treated with proper regard.

- See who can say: *Pimlico pamlico pumkin and peas, /Pepper them properly else you will sneeze*[8] the most quickly.
- Ask the children to bring their own tongue twisters and collect them into class books.

Developing Response to Rhyme & Rhythm

RHYME

Mrs White had a fright
In the middle of the night . . .[9]

"I think what's so clever about this," says a nine-year-old, "is the way it all *rhymes*." Rhyme, as the Opies write with a touch of disapproval, "seems to appeal to a child as something funny and remarkable in itself" — but of course it *is* remarkable. To find words that fall with the same sound on the ear implies a confidence and mastery over language that is initially more important than meaning. Children chant phrases like *Far out, brussel sprout* or *See you later, alligator* for the sheer delight of hearing the rhymes falling after one another.

It's partly the simplicity of the rhyming, very like their own, that makes Spike Milligan's verse so popular with children, or Eve Sutton's *My Cat Likes To Hide in Boxes* (Puffin) an ideal book for children to read for themselves and to try making up extra verses using local place-names, e.g.

The cat from Sydney
Had an odd kidney . . .
The cat from Adelaide
Wore a white sunshade . . .

Some other rhyming activities:

• Read aloud the work of Hilaire Belloc, Ogden Nash and other poets who enjoy rhyming.

• Work the names of children in the grade into new verses for *The Quartermaster's Store*. However "corny" the rhymes, children find this almost miraculous, e.g.

There was Lyn, Lyn,
Hiding in the bin,
In the store, in the store . . .

• Make up poems based on Michael Dugan's *Nonsense Places* (Collins), e.g.

By the harbour at Globe
Lives a four-legged grebe.
Although his brain is dimmer,
He's a very fast swimmer.

The results may not be great poetry, but children will be delighting in learning how to play with language, while savouring its "curiosity" to the full.

RHYMES AND RHYTHM

My mother said
I never should
Play with the gypsies
In the wood . . .

Most of us probably clapped our way through that rhyme, or one similar, when we ourselves were young. Playground pastimes like skipping or clapping games depend on strong rhythms, for it is rhythm that provides the structure for the game:

Granny in the kitchen
Doing a bit of stitchin'.
Along comes a bogeyman
And kicks her out.[1]

Fumble the rope, you've lost the beat and "out you go". It's a robust, hearty rhythm which we sometimes mislay inside the classroom, thereby depriving children of one of the great joys of poetry.

• Move on to poems like Spike Milligan's *On the Ning Nang Nong*[8], or Dr Seuss' *Fox in Sox* (Collins) or Richard Scarry's *ABC Word Book* (Collins).

• Try writing alliterative alphabet books like Deborah Niland's *ABC of Monsters* (Hodder) or one-letter stories.

NONSENSE LANGUAGE

Nonsense words come newly minted. They surprise us by the unexpectedness of their sound or their shape on the page. Children enjoy nonsense poems because they like the play on normal language:

There were three ghostesses
Sitting on postesses
Eating buttered toastesses . . .

If we want to develop children's pleasure in the "curiosity of language" we should give them plenty of nonsense rhymes. When one thinks of the restricted (or banal) language children encounter on television, at home or in school readers, one realises that their overall diet is often bland or boring or restricted — or all three.

• Read Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* aloud and ask the children to get up and "galumph"[10].

• Try Eve Merriam's *Mean Song*:

Don't show your face
Around any place
Or you'll get one flack smack
in the base . . .[10]

The words may be nonsense, but we get their meaning loud and clear because of their sound and associations.

• Ask children to make up instructions that we can more or less follow, using nonsense language.

• Read *The Lorax* (Collins) by Dr Seuss and discuss the shape of a "snergeily hose".

Again the meaning is built into the sound and appearance of the word, and from there it's a short step to onomatopoeia and all the words that contain meaning in sound, to poems like *"Firecracker, firecracker/Boom boom boom"*[7] or Carl Sandburg's *"The sea-wash never ends/The sea-wash repeats, repeats . . ."*[10], and to writing a class poem on, say, the sounds of early morning, in which each line must contain a "noise" word like splash, hiss or whirr.

ENJOYING RHYTHM

We've all had the iniquities of reading poetry in a tum-ti-tum sort of way so drummed into us that we tend to go to the other extreme and read poetry as though it were prose chopped into pieces. If we're reading something like George Herbert's *Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright*, we're obviously not going to emphasise the beat, for the mood of the poem is dictated far more by the words and imagery. It's a very different matter, however, when we come to read *The Fiddler of Dooney*, where W. B. Yeats has made the poem so rhythmical that the words dance off the page:

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney
Folk dance like a wave of the sea . . .[10]

Again it's part of letting ourselves go with poetry; if the rhythm is there to be enjoyed, then let's make a point of positively enjoying it as children do in their own rhymes. Use percussion to emphasise the rhythm in something like:

The more it snows
(Tiddely pom),
The more it goes
(Tiddely pom),
The more it goes
(Tiddely pom)
On snowing.[7]

or in the traditional rhyme *Drummer Hoff/Fired it off* to supply an extra two beats between the lines. Accentuate the pounding, relentless rhythm of Alfred Noyes' *The Highwayman*[11] by using wood blocks (or half coconut shells) to represent the persistent hoofbeats throughout.

POETRY AND MUSIC

A remarkable number of the rhymes in *Far Out, Brussel Sprout!* are based on popular tunes:

Good King Wenceslas
Went to town
In a Mini Minor,
Crashed into an atom bomb
And ended up in China.[1]

It's a useful reminder that the boundary between poetry and song is slight: both are rhythmical structures. Many poems started off as songs: many songs started off as poems. So, sing as well as say:

There's a hole in my bucket,
dear Liza, dear Liza,
There's a hole in my bucket,
dear Liza, a hole . . .

for it emphasises the slow dragging rhythm of this interminable saga — which children love for its repetition and inexorable logic. There is, incidentally, a version of this, illustrated by William Stobbs, in the Umbrella Books, published by O.U.P., which children can read for themselves. If there's no music, get the children to clap and slap the beat as they chant:

Old Solomon Grey is buried
and dead,
Buried and dead, buried and
dead,
Old Solomon Grey is buried
and dead,
Sob, sob, sob . . .

Once they feel the 6/8 rhythm of the tale, they can try making up similar chants themselves, for it is a rhythm and structure they will find easy to copy. Try clapping an accompaniment to

Dictation, dictation,
dictation
Three sausages went to the
station . . .

or

IN came the doctor,
IN came the nurse,
IN came the lady
With the alligator purse . . .[9]

so that children hear the verbal music of words like "alligator purse" tripping along above the beat.

POETRY AND MOVEMENT

Historically, poetry was also intertwined with dance-drama. Hunts were re-enacted or anticipated in chant and movement; even some of our Christmas carols were danced as well as sung. Through the centuries, however, we have divorced poetry from movement and it's only in the playground that chant is still expressed spontaneously in action, as in *Heel, toe, over she goes* or *All IN with a bottle of gin/ All OUT with a bottle of stout.*[1] Movement, words and the rhythm that holds the words in place all become inextricably blended in a child's memory. If we want the same thing to happen inside the classroom *we need to get the children moving to poetry* whenever appropriate.

- Ask children to bring along their favourite *skipping rhymes*. Try them out and make them into illustrated books.
- Sitting on the floor, hold a partner's hands and lean backwards and forwards in time to *Row, row, row your boat*, with all its numerous parodies.[1]
- Try **bouncing a ball** or **bobbing** in time to Tony Connor's marvellous gabbling poem, *A Child's Bouncing Song*[2], **marching** to C. S. Lewis's *March for Drum, Trumpet and Twenty-one Giants*[4] or **trotting** to Kipling's *Smuggler's Song*.[4]
- Clare Scott-Mitchell puts three horse poems one after the other in *When a Goose Meets a Moose*[12], one *cantering*, one at full *gallop* and a peaceful dream-like poem by de la Mare — to read when everyone's puffed!
- Wind up the spell of:

Spin a coin, spin a coin,
All fall down,
Queen Nefertiti
Stalks through the town . . .[10]

by having the whole class move slowly round the room randomly as they chant the verses and mime the actions.

- While five children dramatise Rosemary Wells' vivacious verse story, *Noisy Nora* (Picture Lions), have the rest of the class tap out the rhythm to give the feeling of non-stop bustle:

Jack had dinner early,
Father played with Kate,
Jack needed burping
So Nora had to wait . . .

Once the rhythm is established in children's memories, and the words associated with actions, they will have less trouble reading the story for themselves, for even if the right word eludes them they will probably be able to cue in an alternative that still fits the vigorous beat.

Extending Outwards

STARTING WITH THE FAMILIAR

Books, however cheerfully presented, remain objects of suspicion so far as some children are concerned, alien things full of stories that are frequently unfamiliar and have laboriously to be de-coded. In children's traditional lore and language, however, we have a large corpus of non-book material that is familiar, while also being amusing and highly verbal. Why not copy historical precedent and, starting with their *oral language*, work towards *written language*, where children can suddenly see their own words fastened down in print or, beginning with rhymes that children know from the playground, tempt cautious readers into less familiar literature?

RIDDLES

Riddles, like so many other forms of children's traditional language, are highly satisifying because children feel that they are *in charge of* the words, manipulating them for their *own* use, turning a noun into a verb in something like, "Why did the window-box? Because it saw the garden-fence", or playing with *sound* in a riddle, e.g. "What did the earwig say when it fell off the wall? 'Ere we go'". Like "knock-knock" jokes, riddles imply a verbal coming-of-age, so let's use and enjoy them.

• Ask children to contribute their favourite riddles, write them down and make into class books with the answers over-leaf.

• Give younger readers Rodney Peppe's book *Hey Riddle Diddle* (Puffin) with its rhymed riddles and picture clues, or Bennet Cerf's *Animal Riddles* and *Book of Riddles* (Collins "Beginner Book" series).

• Higher up the school, if "riddle fever" strikes, read aloud the lovely riddling story *The Golden Valley*, brilliantly re-told by Ruth Manning-Sanders in *A Book of Monsters* (Methuen) or *Riddles in the Dark* from *The Hobbit* (Allen and Unwin).

• Try children on riddle poems like William Jay Smith's *The Toaster*[6] or de la Mare's puzzle poem *Five Eyes*, or the much more complicated and ancient ones in *The Puffin Book of Salt Sea Verse*[13] or in *Corne Hither*[14].

• Write riddle poems where children describe an object without actually naming it, first in four or five words, one for each sense, and then, when they are more confident, in four or five lines, each based still on a sensory impression. What, for example, do you think this is?

You are clear.
I can see through your
shapeless world.
I can hear your singing
coolness.

PARODIES

Jingle bells,
Robin smells,
Batman flew away;
Lost his pants while over
France
And found them in Bombay.[1]

Children's traditional verse is full of parodies because familiar tunes provide a structure on which to hang irreverent words.

• Try singing the correct words to *Oh dear, what can the matter be, John Brown's Body* or *Jingle Bells* and ask for other versions.

• Write down the less scurrilous ones so that, again, they are there to be read, the spoken words pinned to the page.

• Introduce children to *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (if they don't already know it) and sing it as an action song. Most of the actions are obvious, but, for the partridge, stand on one leg, the other tucked up behind, with one hand forming the beak and the other the tail; for the turtle dove, cross arms over chest.

• Look at a couple of picture book versions of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* to see how different artists like Brian Wildsmith or Jack Kent have interpreted the words. Talk about which is the more successful.

• Find parodies of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* (e.g. *A Wart Snake in a Fig Tree*, full of nightmares and vampires); then ask children, in pairs, to write their own versions (e.g. a list of bizarre presents, for which their partner has to write thank-you letters) and finally, if you can get hold of it, read *Letters of Thanks*, written by the eleven year-old M. Kempadoo (Collins).

• Take in *Each Peach Pear Plum* (Puffin) by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, in which many children will recognise their own rhyme, *Inch pinch pear plum*. Try writing further parodies like *Each train car tram/I spy Superman/Superman in a sulk/I spy the Incredible Hulk . . .*

FRACTURED NURSERY RHYMES

Display, on large sheets of paper round the classroom, some fractured nursery rhymes, e.g.

Ding dong bell
Pussy's in the well.
If you don't believe it,
Go and have a smell.[1]

or some of the many versions of *Mary had a little lamb*, e.g.

Mary had a little lamb,
Her father shot it dead,
And now it goes to school
with her
Between two chunks of
bread.[1]

Ask for more contributions, hunt out the originals and try writing new ones — *The Grand Old Duke of York, Jack and Jill* or *Hey Diddle Diddle* would all lend themselves to fracturing particularly well. In the same way, read the conventional versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* or *The*

Three Bears and then see what Roald Dahl has made of them in *Revolting Rhymes* (Cape) or Barry Cornzi in *Kid Rotten's Book of Stories for Rotten Kids* (Heinemann).

TRAIN CHANTS

• Train chants are fun to do. Start with "bacon and eggs" (repeat twice, getting faster, then "apple custard" (repeat twice, getting faster still), then "cheese and biscuits" (repeat three times), then "fish and chips" (repeat three times as fast as possible) building up to "soooooooup".[4]

• Take a selection of place names like Hay, Parramatta, Wagga Wagga and Woolloomooloo and make up similar train chants.

• Move on to Clive Sansom's *The train goes running along the line*[5], with half the class saying the words and the other half chanting "jicketty can, jicketty can".

• Try James Tippett's *Here Come the Trains*[6], again with half the class chuffing, faster and faster.

• There are train stories like Nan Hunt's *Whistle Up the Chimney* (Collins) with excellent sound effects that can be made by children.

• Read train poems like *From a Railway Carriage* by R. L. Stevenson, or W. H. Auden's *Night Mail*[7], with its headlong rush.

SCARY STORIES

We can start with something as dozy as *The night was dark and stormy,/The dunny light was dim . . .*[8] before telling the story that begins *In a dark dark wood*[9], a tale which children can read for themselves in the Rigby "Story Box" series.

While on the subject of ghosts, we can chant

A woman in a churchyard sat,
Oo-oo-ah-ah!
Very short and very fat,
Oo-oo-ah-ah! . . .[10]

and then get the children to make their own picture book versions of this truncated tale. We can give them *The Teeny Tiny Woman* (Picture Puffin) to read, with its constant creepy repetition, or *The Hairy Toe*, the same tale in a different guise in the Rigby "Story Box" series.

SELECTION

A peanut sat on a railroad
track,
Its heart was all a-flutter,
Around the corner came the
4.15—
Bang! Crash! Peanut Butter! –

A macabre little rhyme like this can immediately become a jumping off point for other Terse Verse like *Algy met a Bear,/The Bear met Algy . . .*[3] or for excursions into *In the Garden of Bad Things*,[11] Doug MacLeod's collection of grisly ditties. We must never forget, however, that we are interlopers when we come to children's rhymes and chants. Although we can use many of the rhymes as a fun introduction to other poems and stories, to reading or writing, we should be wary of using rhymes in which we appear to side with children against adults. This practice is likely to cause children the same sort of embarrassment as their parents do when they play the fool in public or try to be more "swinging" or "with it" than their children. Pick more neutral material like riddles, tongue twisters, fractured nursery rhymes, parodies or the odd, ingenuous joke.

USING THE RHYMES

Equally, we must remember that children's rhymes are fun occupations.

• They are "mouth music" to accompany pastimes like skipping or bouncing balls.

• They are jokes and witticisms cast in a form that is easily remembered.

• They are part of the children's weaponry against the pomposity of the adult world.

• It would not only be foolish, it would be downright rude and presumptuous to take children's own fun verse and turn it into a weapon against them, using it for vocabulary exercises, for dissection or comprehension or enforced learning. We must approach it in the same way that children do, as a light-hearted way of playing about with language, or moving to words. The rhymes must remain fun to do, fun to say and any extension work should preserve a spirit of spontaneity.

TEACHER AND PUPIL ROLES

Lastly, as June Factor comments in her afterword to *Far Out, Brussel Sprout*[3], "The children become the teachers, which is good for confidence and encouraging for everyone". Children are "the authority in this field", and we must acknowledge this switch in roles. We do not teach children's rhymes, we share them by courtesy of the children themselves, and, while we're sharing and listening, we may find that the reluctant reader has become an enthusiastic teacher.

References

1. June Factor, *comp.* **Par Out, Brussel Sprout!** Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1985.

An invaluable and attractive collection of chants and rhymes designed for children to read themselves.

2. D. Cook and K. Gallasch, *eds.* **Improving on the Blank Page.** Adelaide, Rigby, 1972.

It is to be hoped that this useful collection will be reprinted. Besides containing Tony Connor's *Child's Bouncing Song*, the teachers' edition gives suggestions for poetry activities and for musical and visual stimuli.

3. Jill Bennett, *comp.*, Helen Oxenbury, *illus.* **Tiny Tim.** London, Heinemann, 1981.

One could not find a more attractive way of introducing poetry to the very young. Only twenty poems but, on the other hand, not a single dud!

4. Victoria — Education Department. **Happily Ever After.** (1975).

An enormously useful and stimulating collection of literature ideas with a particularly good section on poetry. Beg, borrow or steal a copy — for it is, unfortunately, out of print.

5. Iona and Peter Opie. **The Lore and Language of School children.** London, Oxford University Press, 1959.

A scholarly account of children's rhymes, riddles, parodies and customs from many parts of Britain.

6. Clive Sansom. **Acting Rhymes.** London, Black, 1975.

Rhymes to mime, to act or play as games with a group.

7. Kaye Webb, *ed.* **I Like This Poem.** Harmondsworth, Puffin, 1979.

Poems chosen by children from 6 to 15, with reasons for their choice. It's a fascinating and revealing anthology, for it includes poems one often dismisses as an adult, yet loved as a child. Free verse figures very little, while rhyme and rhythm are given as reasons for personal choice again and again.

8. Clive Sansom. **Speech Rhymes.** London, Black, 1974.

Rhymes which help children articulate sounds more clearly while, at the same time, enjoying themselves.

9. Spike Milligan. **Silly Verse for Kids.** Harmondsworth, Puffin, 1968.

Supremely silly verse by one of the masters of the genre.

10. Brian Thompson. **Bull's Eye.** Harmondsworth, Kestrel, 1977.

An unusual and particularly satisfying collection of poems divided into equally unusual sections, e.g. **Snails, Horse and Rider, For Music.**

11. Alfred Noyes. **The Highwayman.** London, Oxford University Press, 1981.

A brilliantly effective picture book (Charles Keeping) version of a poem which it is easy to ridicule as an adult, but which grabs children because of its drama, its romance, its language and rhythm.

12. Clare Scott-Mitchell, *comp.* **When a Goose Meets a Moose.** Sydney, Methuen, 1980.

A most attractive book for younger children, with poems that get right away from usual anthology fare.

13. Charles Causley, *comp.* **The Puffin Book of Salt Sea Verse.** Harmondsworth, Puffin, 1978.

As one might expect from a poet-compiler, an unusual and arresting anthology, chiefly for older children.

14. Walter de la Mare, *comp.* **Come Hither.** Harmondsworth, Puffin, 1975.

An inexhaustible anthology with some of the most interesting material of all, including *Eight Ancient Riddles* tucked away in **About and Roundabout**, a section of notes, ideas, additional poems and folklore suggested by certain poems in the collection.

15. Doug MacLeod. **In the Garden of Bad Things.** Melbourne, Kestrel, 1981.

A popular selection of deliciously gruesome poems by the talented young Melbourne writer.

N.B. The C. S. Lewis *March for Drum, Trumpet and Twenty-One Giants* can also be found in **Voices Book 1** (Penguin Educational), the *Endless Chant* in **Junior Voices Book 1** (Penguin Educational) and *Here Come the Trains* by Tippett in **Time for Poetry**, edited by M. H. Arbuthnot (Scott Foresman).

The illustrations in this P.E.N. are taken mainly from *Pictures and Stories from Forgotten Children's Books* (Dover).

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